

# Save Newport Village



## History

SNV was formed early in 2012 in response to a developer proposing to build hundreds of houses and commercial and retail outlets at Newport Free Grammar School (NFGS), and even to demolish the school and rebuild it elsewhere. A Facebook group was created to help co-ordinate information, opinions and actions

About the same time Uttlesford District Council (UDC) began their consultation into building several thousand homes in the district and in particular on sites all around Newport. SNV set up a committee under the chairmanship of Jo Parry and encouraged everyone in Newport to participate in the consultation.

Newport has about 950 houses. The village was filled out in the 1970s to the limits of the valley, and of its roads and infrastructure. We believe that development on the scale proposed by those working with NFGS and other landowners would devastate Newport. The proposals are in total contradiction of the wishes of residents expressed in the Village Plan published by the Parish Council (PC) at the end of 2010 and reinforced by the result of the survey of every Newport household carried out by the PC earlier this year.

## Consultation

The outcome of the first UDC consultation in Newport was in line with the Village Plan – residents largely said No to greenfield development and Yes to brownfield development on the quarry site. But in our opinion UDC did not have a grip over the running of its consultations; at the display at Church House someone was seen visiting the consultation more than once and putting green ‘build here’ dots onto his site on the map, and Mr Bampton of Pelham Structures was handing out business cards. When it was pointed



**ABOVE:** THE BANK OF COW PARSLEY WOULD BE REMOVED TO WIDEN SCHOOL LANE.  
**BELOW:** FOR THE PANORAMA ‘NEWPORT FROM THE SOUTH, LIKE OTHER SETTLEMENTS IN THE DISTRICT, HIDDEN IN THE VALLEY. SITE 1 WOULD COVER THE FIELD IN THE MIDDLE. DESCRIBED BY THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT AS VISUALLY INTRUSIVE’.

out to the officials that no-one should be doing business there, they refused to take action.

UDC then selected preferred sites for development, for a second consultation, which took place in July. Amazingly their choice was two very large greenfield sites strongly rejected by the village in the first consultation. They proposed a minimum of 370 houses, with no maximum specified. This would be a minimum 40% increase in the size of Newport, and the largest site (for over 300 houses), we consider utterly unsuitable. It is at Whiteditch Lane/Burywater Lane and is too far from the station and the primary school for people to walk there, and would also funnel traffic through the middle of NFGS. Site 2, below the primary school, although more central, still has serious infrastructure issues.

SNV tried to ascertain from UDC why Newport was proposed for such a disproportionately large increase, and why on such unsuitable sites. Their responses were unconvincing, so the SNV committee took a more direct

approach and members attended the UDC Scrutiny Committee, whose function is to review complex material before submission to the Cabinet. We were allowed to speak, but the chair refused to allow the committee to answer our questions; we were ignored, and we watched the proposed plans pushed through to the next stage

We persevered but after several requests UDC produced no understandable planning rationale for its treatment of Newport. Their ‘planning’ involved asking developers and landowners to put forward sites which they could activate. They then picked enough of these around the district to meet the totals they were seeking. For large planning applications a Sustainability Assessment is required. SNV reviewed the Assessment for Site 1 and found many material errors, omissions and, in our opinion, invalid conclusions. Here are two examples: the Assessment says there is no primary school in Newport, thus avoiding having to say the site is too far away from it; and the answer to the question

about increased traffic, pollution and congestion is left blank even though it could clearly add about 1,000 vehicle movements a day through the village. The Planning Dept has not responded to our criticism of their document and so we cannot ascertain if these faults were introduced to bias the results towards development, or were poor workmanship and lack of quality control We did however obtain one admission – they agree the site would be visually intrusive.

## Survey

For the July consultation SNV distributed fliers to all homes in Newport encouraging residents to visit the display in Church House, and to respond in writing. We also prepared handouts covering key issues and manned a stall at the Carnival (where one of the organisers stopped us walking around the Common asking people if they wanted to sign a petition opposing the proposed large scale development in Newport). As the PC was still holding a position of neutrality it was suggested that they survey village opinion, which to their credit they did. And Jo Parry took the vacant seat on the PC to ensure that SNV has “a voice at the table”.

The second consultation at Church House all seemed civilised. There was a display inside, and out in the courtyard the PC handed out survey sheets, and SNV handed out leaflets. Then UDC staff tried to remove the SNV material and hide it. When that failed two senior UDC officials forced Jo Parry out of the courtyard. We complained to the UDC Chief Executive about this stifling of local views, and other maladministration at the display, but were dismissed by him in a letter as ‘opinionated’ and a ‘single issue group’.

## Successes

The PC survey confirmed that the village is overwhelmingly against the proposed major developments. So in their consultation response Newport PC strongly rejected the proposals, as did other town and parish councils. A large number of critical responses were made by Newport residents, and thousands by others across the district. A representative of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), invited to Newport by SNV, made a posting against Site 1 and suggested UDC look instead at the quarry site.

To keep matters in the public mind SNV regularly sent letters on a series of topics to the local media (who have been brilliant). These included water (none to spare), sewage (too much already) and safety (why should Newport take major developments in order to fund safety improvements at NFGS?). Letters were copied to our district councillors, Andrew Taylor (Head of the Planning Dept) and Cllr Susan Barker (portfolio holder for the Plan). We also complained

COMMITTEE MEMBERS JO PARRY AND SUSAN CAMERON HANDING OUT LEAFLETS AT THE CHURCH HOUSE CONSULTATION.



about the favouritism of UDC to developers and landowners. For example Pelham Structures submitted documents dated after the consultation close date that should have been rejected, but instead were fast tracked onto the website ahead of hundreds of other submissions.

Despite the barrage of arguments against the UDC proposals as unpopular, undeliverable and unsustainable, and despite serious accusations in the papers that a few councillors held un-recorded meetings at which they completely changed the plan, UDC leadership appear determined that it will go ahead. They have however delayed the next phase. A ‘final’ plan will now be presented for consultation in January 2013.

## Encouraged

We were most encouraged by the response of the village at the September meeting of the Parish Council at which Mr Bampton presented plans relating to Site 1. These included three roundabouts (two on School Lane and one at the



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THE ROW OF PROTECTED TREES OPPOSITE THE ENTRANCE TO NFGS WOULD BE CUT DOWN, AND A BRIDGE AND ROUNDABOUT INSTALLED

junction of Bury Water Land and Cambridge Road), road widenings and a bridge between the two sides of the Grammar School, all of which he admitted he couldn't finance. There was an excellent attendance and District Councillor Jeremy Rose led a very strong attack on the plan, clearly in line with the feeling of the meeting.

To keep up the pressure on UDC to produce an acceptable plan SNV has teamed up with other groups in the district.

These are the Saffron Walden group WeAreResidents, Listen to Dunmow Residents, and Thaxted Voice. Our cooperation includes joint press statements, the sharing of knowledge and attendance at UDC meetings. And we have a page on the WeAreResidents website: <http://newport.weareresidents.org>

**Get Involved**

“Thank you for doing this” is a sentiment we have often heard since starting our campaign. But if you want the village to be protected from unsuitable development, it needs everyone's help. For example we need letters written under names that aren't always the SNV committee (we can provide material for these if that helps) and occasionally we will need larger groups of people to attend UDC meetings to show councillors that voters oppose their plans. Or maybe you can deliver leaflets? Or even take one of the spare seats on the Parish Council?

Please contact [savenewportvillage@gmail.com](mailto:savenewportvillage@gmail.com) to offer support. If you haven't joined us at [www.facebook.com/savenewportvillage](http://www.facebook.com/savenewportvillage) then please consider doing so – that way you can keep up with all the latest information. Lastly, we have raised some funds among the Group and from supporters to cover current costs. However, if we have to present a case at the Planning Inspectorate we may need substantial funds to pay for professional support. If you can make a donation, however small, please contact us for our bank details or write a cheque payable to “Save Newport Village” and deliver it to Midsummer House, Belmont Hill.

**We've made progress. But the threat is still present and there is much more work for ALL of us to do to keep Newport as a village rather than a town! NN**

**The Save Newport Village campaign committee:**

Susan Cameron, Matthew Davidson, Neil Hargreaves, Mandy Ingham, Roy Ingham, Jo Parry and Tristan Rose

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